Pose:
An Honor Council Academic Case
Released Fall 2022

This abstract was not released in accordance with the timeline specified by the Students’ Association Constitution. The confronting party did not consent to the release of the abstract. The confronted party consented to the release of the abstract.

Key:
Confronting Party: Blanca Evangelista
Confronted Party: Elektra Abundance
Class: Ball Culture 200

Summary:
This case was reviewed by Honor Council and dropped instead of being sent to trial. Although Honor Council believed that a violation of the Honor Code had occurred, they decided that the trial goals of education, accountability, and restoration had already been met. Additionally, Council believed that a trial process would harm rather than help these goals, and thus was constitutionally unnecessary in this case.

The case dealt with the midterm exam in Professor Evangelista’s Ball Culture 200 class. The exam was take-home, and completed exams were due in collection boxes outside of Professor Evangelista’s office. Elektra Abundance, a student in Professor Evangelista’s class, struggled to finish the exam because of her anxiety condition. Because of an anxiety attack, she went to the collection box outside of Professor Evangelista’s office, took a random completed exam, and used that to complete her own. While grading the exams, Professor Evangelista noticed many suspicious similarities in wording, answer choices, and examples, and she emailed Elektra and the student whose exam Elektra had copied for clarification. Elektra immediately met with Professor Evangelista and told the truth about what had happened. Both Professor Evangelista and Elektra agreed that a violation of the Honor Code had occurred and Elektra was willing to face the consequences of her actions. Professor Evangelista told Elektra she would be comfortable giving Elektra a 0.0 on the midterm, which Elektra was also comfortable with, but the case needed to be reported to Honor Council. Elektra was worried about a potential trial process, but reported the case to Honor Council, asking Council to pay attention to the issues of mental health and confidentiality inherent to this case. Elektra and Professor Evangelista both felt they were on the same page about this case.
**Council Deliberations:**

Council agreed they were suspicious of a violation. However, they were unsure what to do with this case. Many members of Council voiced concerns that the trial goal of restoration had not been met, since another student’s trust had been broken. Additionally, some members of Council felt especially uncomfortable with the nature of the violation (taking an exam out of a collection box) and believed that the breach of trust with the community had not been restored. Some members also felt uncomfortable with a 0.0 on the exam being the only accountability measure; in past cases, Council members have argued that turning in dishonest work is worse than turning in no work at all, and should earn a worse grade. However, other members of Council noted that the final grade was ultimately up to the professor, and it was Professor Evangelista who had recommended a 0.0 on the exam.

Council also discussed the mental health issues in the case. Many members of Council felt that, even if the trial goals had not been met, a trial would be counterproductive. Because of Council’s workload and the timing of the violation, Council would not be able to run a trial for this case for several months, and this long wait could severely negatively impact Elektra’s emotional and mental health. Some Council members also pointed out that Elektra had taken steps to educate herself and get better treatment for her mental health, fulfilling the trial goal of education. The account of Elektra and Professor Evangelista’s conversations in their statements indicated that they were adequately restored, and since Professor Evangelista had put forward a 0.0 on the exam that Elektra accepted, some members of Council felt that all three trial goals had been met. They held that the case should be dropped.

There were two issues dividing those who wanted the case to go to trial and those who wanted it to be dropped: the goal of restoration, both with the other student and with the community, and the grade change, since some Council members were frustrated that Elektra would have received the same grade if she had just turned in nothing. Those who wanted the case dropped brought up the idea of recommendations. Specifically, they discussed recommending that Elektra write an anonymous letter to be sent to the other student, that Elektra and Professor Evangelista be given the option of a mediated conversation, and that Professor Evangelista be advised about Honor Council’s typical philosophy towards grade changes. These recommendations satisfied many of the Council members who wanted the case to go to trial, but some were still unconvinced. They brought up potential changes to the trial process, such as making it shorter or altering how the individual meetings proceeded. However, these changes couldn’t affect the wait of many months between deliberations and a potential trial. Additionally, Council had no way of knowing what changes, if any, could actually create a positive trial environment for Elektra.

At this point, most of Council was leaning towards dropping the case with the previously
mentioned recommendations. One member of Council mentioned that, since they were recommending many things, maybe it was better for this to be dealt with in trial. However, others felt that the timing of the case, combined with Elektra’s anxiety, made a trial a particularly bad idea. Additionally, they felt that the trial goals had been met regardless of whether or not Elektra completed the recommendations – these were just options Council was giving Elektra for her own progress towards restoration, education, and accountability – and that it was correct to drop this case. One member of Council still believed that a trial was warranted, but they were willing to stand outside of consensus. With that, Honor Council consented to the following.

Honor Council drops this case, with three recommendations: (14 consent, 1 stands outside, 1 is not present)

a) That [Professor Evangelista] is informed of grade change options that past cases brought to council have resulted in, since a few council members felt that a 0.0 isn't sufficient. The rationale behind this was that a 0.0 is the equivalent score to someone who would have chosen to not turn in the assignment, and someone who plagiarises should be worse off than that. In the past, professors have chosen to do step grade changes (for eg. an A changes to an A-) alongside the 0.0, have the student fail the course, given them the lowest passing grade. This decision is ultimately up to you, but we just wanted to make sure that you knew of all these options and council’s deliberations.

b) [That Elektra] writes an anonymous letter to the student that they have plagiarised from.

c) That [Professor Evangelista] and [Elektra] have a mediated conversation (mediation could be done by any member of Honor Council Executive Board).

Discussion Questions:
1. To what extent should the confronted party’s mental health be considered when Council deliberates whether or not to send a case to trial?
2. Does taking someone’s exam out of a box constitute a bigger breach of trust than other more common violations? Does such a violation require increased restoration work between the confronted party and the community?
3. How important are grade changes to ensuring the confronted party’s restoration and accountability?